

AN  
INTRODUCTORY LECTURE  
TO THE  
COURSE ON OBSTETRICS,  
AND  
DISEASES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN,

DELIVERED IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA,

NOVEMBER 7, 1838.

---

BY HUGH L. HODGE, M. D.

---

PHILADELPHIA:  
J. G. AUNER, 331 MARKET STREET.

PRINTED BY L. R. BAILEY, 26 NORTH FIFTH STREET.  
1838.





## CORRESPONDENCE.

---

*Philadelphia, November 21st, 1838.*

PROFESSOR HUGH L. HODGE,

DEAR SIR.—We, the undersigned, a Committee appointed in behalf of the Medical Class of the University of Pennsylvania, to request of you for publication, a copy of your highly appropriate and eloquent Introductory Lecture, take great pleasure in the performance of this trust.

Hoping that you will comply with our request, we are, with sentiments of esteem,

Respectfully, your's,

H. RIDGELY,  
WILLIAM A. HILL,  
THOMAS SAPPINGTON,  
B. BARDWELL,  
A. W. READ,  
THOMAS J. P. STOKES,  
LUCAS GEE.

---

*Philadelphia, November 25th, 1838.*

TO MESSRS. H. RIDGELY, WILLIAM A. HILL, THOMAS SAPPINGTON,  
B. BARDWELL, A. W. READ, THOMAS J. P. STOKES, LUCAS GEE:

GENTLEMEN.—In compliance with the wishes of the Medical Class, as expressed so politely through you, their Committee, I send a copy of my Introductory Lecture for publication; although it had reference merely to the interesting circumstances under which we lately formed our connexion as teacher and pupils.

Most respectfully, your's,

HUGH L. HODGE.





## INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

---

GENTLEMEN OF THE MEDICAL CLASS—

It is with much pleasure, we welcome you to these halls dedicated to science. We, the professors in this University, now form with you that interesting connexion which constitutes us, respectively, teachers and pupils, with feelings analogous to those, existing between parents and their children. We must feel ourselves responsible, in some degree, for your improvement in the sciences of medicine; and also for the intellectual, moral, and professional influence which you will undoubtedly exercise, hereafter, whether for good or evil, over the inhabitants of this extended country. Our teaching, our opinions on professional subjects, must give a bias, more or less powerful, to minds, hitherto but partially instructed in the science of medicine—*minds*, which, you and we should remember, will in future years regulate the practice of the profession, with all its relative interests, in this community.

As your duties hereafter, will be of the most important character; as health or sickness, life or death, will be indissolubly connected with your opinions and practice, we should all reflect seriously on the nature and importance of our present relations—that our respective duties as teachers and pupils, being suitably discharged, you may be adequately prepared for the responsible stations which most of you will soon occupy among your fellow citizens.

You all have arrived at that age, at which you begin to realize the necessity of assuming your places as members of society. The season of youth has nearly passed; during which

you have been preparing for the active business of life; the time for preparation has nearly elapsed; the last series of studies now engages your attention. Time, which ever glides rapidly, steadily, and often, alas! imperceptibly, will very soon bring that most important epoch of your lives, when action must be substituted for abstract study; the practice of medicine for its theory; and the responsibilities of an anxious and important profession, for the interesting speculations on the healthy or deranged functions of the animal economy. When this period arrives, your experience will differ materially from nearly all your predecessors, if you do not look back with regret on the imperfect improvement of the opportunities now offered for your advancement in medical knowledge; you will then mourn, perhaps with feelings of self-reproach, that such a subject was not studied—such a point was not investigated—such a dissection was not made—such a demonstration was not attended to—such a lecture was not even heard. Then, when you perceive that your professional character and your prospects in life are blasted, and especially that the life of a valued citizen, has been lost through ignorance of some one point, it may be, of medical knowledge, you will lament, that you had not profited by the advice of friends and the experience of your teachers, at a period, such as the present, when every facility for the acquisition of knowledge is afforded; when those whose age and experience have enabled them to discover the difficulties in the practice of medicine, and the mode of avoiding or relieving them; to point out the dangers of the voyage, the rocks and the shoals, and to indicate at the same time, the stars on which your eye should be fixed, and the charts which may prove safe conductors for you, the professed pilots on these dangerous seas; when those, I say, who have repeatedly encountered these perils, and can estimate their magnitude, are at your command—when they are prepared and anxious to bring all the results of their studies, their observation, and multiplied experience, for your inspection and your profit.

That such regrets, that such self-condemning retrospections may not be your portion in time to come, depends almost exclusively on yourselves. Successive years have enabled the

professors of this University, to accumulate so abundantly and variously the means of instruction and the facilities of illustration, and they are so anxious now, as ever, for the welfare of their pupils, so ready to expend time, thought, and labour, on all occasions for their improvement, that we must believe that every student who diligently employs his time and talents, will obtain that information which will suitably prepare him for the practice of the medical art—which will render him a valuable auxiliary, it may be a triumphant leader, of that band of scientific physicians, who have undertaken a deadly warfare with pain and disease, (those dire enemies to the happiness of man)—who have determined, as far as in them lies, that the miseries of human nature shall be alleviated, that disease shall be arrested in its progress, and old age be the chief avenue to the grave.

Such a consummation of the medical profession, you may perhaps regard as visionary, and so it may be. It is not probable, that even remote ages of the world, which shall witness triumphs in science of which we have not even the slightest conceptions, will fully realize the prospect just presented of the perfection of medical science. But if not probable, gentlemen, it is possible; for what we know, every poison may have its antidote, every pain its alleviator, and every disease in the long, long catalogue of human suffering, may hereafter meet with its appropriate specific, by which its ravages will be arrested and its fatal tendencies avoided: or if this be not attainable, it may be, that each form of morbid affection may find some Jenner, so fortunate and observant as to discover, and so intelligent and industrious as successfully to apply a preventive, mild in its character and efficient in its results; a substitute which, like the vaccine virus, will each rob some terrible and desolating disease of all its horrors, and present its discoverer, with the name of Jenner, to the gratitude of successive generations.

If such results be therefore within the bounds of possibility, they should be aimed at, however improbable may be their attainment. You, as young men, especially, should know that it is absolutely necessary to aspire after great things, even if you should desire moderate results: you must endeavour to be first,



even if you should be contented with a secondary station. In all human probability, you will never do much for your profession, never of course contribute much to the amelioration of human suffering, unless you shall constantly keep your aspirations high, unless you aim at a degree of perfection in medicine, which may seem, at least to the common observer, unattainable.

To avoid, therefore, regrets hereafter of misimproved opportunities, to obtain that knowledge which will benefit your profession, your fellow creatures, and yourselves, we invite you to study the nature and importance of the various departments of medical science, to form high ideas of its utility, and to devote your talents and attainments, now and through the remainder of life, industriously and perseveringly to its improvement and exaltation. Never consider, as has well been remarked, any thing done, while any thing remains to be done. Whoever is satisfied with the present, does nothing for the future.

In our profession, however, gentlemen, much remains to be accomplished. Considered as a science, very little has been effected. There is every encouragement afforded for young men of talents and education, to devote themselves to its improvement, and thus very effectually render themselves benefactors to the world. Those rewards will be theirs, which are derived from the enthusiastic and successful cultivation of the mental powers, and, what characterizes our profession, in comparison with other sciences, from the exercise of the kind and benevolent affections of the heart. Greater rewards—rewards which confer a more substantial and permanent gratification, are hardly to be found among the pursuits of mortals.

The wants of the profession—the deficiencies of each department of medical science—the difficulties in its cultivation—the obstacles to bring even good principles to bear successfully on practical points, will readily appear during the lectures, connected with the different professorships in this University.

As regards obstetric science, much has been accomplished, especially of late years, but much remains to be done; and, I must entertain the hope, that many—would that I could believe all of you, will become so much interested in the scientific



pursuit of a department of the profession—especially devoted to the welfare of the lovely and delicate portion of the human family—that its deficiencies will be remedied, and its principles be fully cultivated and practically improved—that each of you will become a *scientific obstetrician*.

Intimately, and perhaps indissolubly connected with this great object, is the diffusion through society of correct views on the practical value of obstetrics as a branch of science. It is truly astonishing, that so much ignorance should exist on this subject; that not only will females commit themselves, but that the husbands and fathers of females will trust their wives and daughters, to the most ignorant, prejudiced, and even decrepid beings, during the dangerous process of parturition; that they will commit the dearest objects of their affections, during the most painful and terrific moments of their existence, to the management of those who, from their age, their mental and corporeal infirmities, are not regarded as capable of any other trust.

It is indeed wonderful, at this age of the world, remarkable for the triumphs of science, the diffusion of knowledge, and the comparative cultivated state of society, that the prejudices and ignorance of the community should remain so general and so pertinacious; that the manifestation of common sense and natural feeling, on almost every other point, should be so conspicuous, while here, where all that is dear to the human heart, or important to society is involved, so little good sense and genuine feeling are exhibited.

It is difficult to account for this singular phenomenon. We should suppose that mere timidity—the anxious desire, inherent in human beings, to escape from pain and danger, would induce the delicate and nervous female to apply earnestly to the best sources for help, during the agonizing process of parturition; and that their male and female friends would be equally solicitous for the objects of their affection. Nothing, however, can resist, it would seem, the prejudices of the human mind, when uninstructed, or liberate it from a blind deference to the dogmatic

assertions and positive assurances of ignorant or designing empirics.

Parturition, they say, is a natural process. Nature must have her way; in good time, all will be right. It is wrong to alter the process, or to assist, even in dangerous cases. Females, among the lower order of animals, deliver themselves; and savages have no assistance during this important process.

Empirics of either sex, with few or no qualifications, gain credence by positive assurances; by details of their own excellencies; and the recital of wonderful cases. Hence, we may presume, the uninstructed and timid mother, and her equally ignorant, perhaps more culpable friends, either allow no assistance in cases of emergency, or commit the whole case to the officiousness of ignorance; to one who promises every thing, but who can effect nothing on proper principles: doing good, if any thing good appear, only by chance.

Perhaps, also, in this enumeration of the causes of feminine distrust in the profession; of their singular adherence to those assistants, who are ignorant and infirm, we should not omit the painful declaration, that members of the profession are not always qualified to afford them proper assistance—and, hence, following the example of the empiric, assert that too much is done for females; that nature is adequate for her own work; that time and patience are alone demanded: or else, sinning on the opposite extreme, imagining that nothing can be done by natural laws, that assistance is always necessary, and that they, without previous knowledge or suitable instruction, can at once interfere, and artificially deliver the unfortunate mother.

That mischief must frequently result to the parturient female, when such ignorance prevails in the members of the profession; when such treatment, whether negative or positive, is professionally adopted, there can be no doubt, as is abundantly proved, not only by reasoning from established and simple facts, but by sad experience. Too many, far too many females have perished through the ignorance of the obstetrician; and a much larger number of infants have, from the same melancholy cause,

passed immediately from the womb of their mother to the grave. Wherever, therefore, the profession is ignorant, we cannot wonder that females are distrustful; that they should be unwilling to call for assistance, when there is reason to fear such assistance will be for evil rather than good.

As already intimated, it is the imperative duty of the present, and of succeeding generations of physicians, to destroy all such prejudices against the science and practice of tokology. It is their duty, first to qualify themselves fully and perfectly for the practice of this department of the profession, and then to diffuse, in every direction, a knowledge of the great value of obstetrics, as a practical science; to demonstrate, by reasoning and by experience, that however natural may be the process of parturition, however easy it may be, comparatively, among the lower orders of animals and among savages, yet that in civilized life, it is always a dangerous process; that difficulties are very numerous, often unavoidable, often occurring suddenly and violently; that death of the child is not unfrequent, and that sometimes the mother also is lost; that even among savages and among the lower orders of animals, difficult, dangerous, and fatal parturition is not uncommon; to inculcate, without vain boasting or self-praise, that in the present state of obstetric science, most of these sources of danger and of death, can be avoided or removed; that existing difficulties can be diminished or destroyed; and that the lives of mother and child can be, and are very frequently preserved through the instrumentality of the accoucheur, when they otherwise would inevitably be lost. If these facts can be substantiated; if this information can be promulgated; if females can be induced to believe that their sufferings will be diminished, or shortened, and their lives and those of their offspring, be safer in the hands of the profession; there will be no further difficulty in establishing the universal practice of obstetrics. All the prejudices of the most ignorant or nervous female, all the innate and acquired feelings of delicacy, so characteristic of the sex, will afford no obstacle to the employment of male practitioners. Every opposition will vanish; much suffering will be saved; and the lives of many mothers



and their unconscious and helpless infants, will be preserved as triumphant illustrations of the value of obstetric science. The rule will be universally established, that every labour should be superintended by an instructed obstetrician.

The object of the ensuing course of lectures, will be to point out the difficulties of the parturient process, inherent or accidental, and how these difficulties are to be most successfully encountered; and thus to enable you to demonstrate to others, (in, as well as out of the profession,) theoretically and practically, the utility of our art; its great and essential importance.

At present, we shall notice some of the prejudices against our science, to which we have already referred as still operative on the minds of females and their friends, and which have received too much support from the ignorant members of the profession.

The foundation of these prejudices seems to be that, because parturition is a natural process, therefore assistance is unnecessary, often injurious, and ought not to be attempted. Nature ought to finish her own work; and, if not interfered with, will almost universally succeed. These general assertions are attempted to be supported by facts and arguments.

Thousands and tens of thousands of females are delivered in safety without assistance. The females of the lower orders of animals have no assistance, and meet with few difficulties. Savages employ no obstetrician; their wives heed not the pains of gestation, nor the pangs of labour, pursuing their accustomed avocations, before and after this supposed terrific process, with apparent impunity. Hence, it is asked, why should assistance be ever proffered to the parturient female—why establish obstetrics as a science, and insist on the importance of its study and practice? We answer, without fear of refutation, that these opinions, and the inferences just stated, are incorrect; they cannot be substantiated; they are at war with the daily experience of every one instructed in the science and practice of obstetrics, who continually perceives how much evil is avoided, how many dangers are obviated, how great good is accom-

plished to mothers and their children, by the practical application of the principles of this branch of medical science.

On an occasion, similar to the present, I demonstrated, that the arguments drawn from analogy, as regards parturition among the lower orders of animals, are in all respects futile. It was shown, that they often do meet with difficulties during labour; difficulties which always aggravate their sufferings; which often result in the death of the parents, and still more frequently of their offspring: that however easy might be their parturient efforts, yet analogy failed in some important points, as respected the human race, particularly as regards the form and size of the pelvis, its straits, its axis, &c., and also as regards the form and dimensions of the fœtal cranium: that the irritability of their tissues and organs was trifling in comparison, so that there is far less danger of inflammation and fever with all their varieties and attending dangers: that their sensibility was not comparable to that of the human female; there is therefore less suffering; of course less impression on the nervous system; less probability of its being injuriously depressed, so that prostration and death will result; or, inordinately excited, so that spasms, convulsions, and coma, with all their frightful consequences, will be induced.

In animals, also, we discover no indications of those intellectual and moral powers which characterize the human race, and which, as you will soon learn, have a most extensive and powerful influence on all the phenomena of gestation and parturition in the human female; which so frequently produce complications of the most sudden and dangerous character. From these, the unthinking, the unfeeling brute is delivered.

As regards parturition among savages, and among females in the lower walks of life, accustomed to labour and hardships, similar observations may be repeated. They have usually easy labours. The contractions of the uterus and its accessory organs are very powerful, and the resistances are diminished by the abundance of the secretions, and the consequent relaxation of the tissues. Still it is by no means true that they are exempt from danger, or their lives are not often forfeited. The earliest

records of the human race give cases of difficult parturition, terminating fatally, and indicate the existence of midwifery as a distinct occupation. Subsequent accounts of the process of parturition in savage life, and other primeval states of society, confirm the general statement, that cases not unfrequently occur when labour is dangerous, impracticable, and fatal, without artificial assistance. Hence, to the wandering and degraded female of the most wild and hardy inhabitants of the prairie or the forest, an obstetrician would very often prove a blessing in preventing such accidents, or in affording relief when death would be otherwise inevitable.

Moreover, on the occasion referred to, I endeavoured to point out some of the influences of civilization on the female constitution; to demonstrate, that while it undoubtedly enervates the strength, it exalts the irritability and sensibility of the tissues; while it diminishes the power, it renders the system more susceptible to injurious impressions. Moreover, as civilization, as refinement of manners, and cultivation of the intellectual powers are advanced, the mental, the spiritual portion of our nature exerts a more decided influence over the actions of the economy, especially in females. The process of parturition, which otherwise might be favourable, is therefore often dangerously complicated from mental excitement or from moral influences; and very often after the agony is over, by the same causes, the most terrible diseases are excited, which, under even the most scientific treatment, not unfrequently prove fatal.

Should our attention be therefore limited to *a priori* reasoning on this important subject, the conclusion seems inevitable, that although parturition is a process of the female economy, which, like respiration and digestion, is usually effected without peculiar difficulty or great danger, nevertheless, that, from the peculiarity of structure of the human female, from the irritability and sensibility of her tissues, from the influence of the mind and heart on the uterine functions, and especially from the exaltation of the nervous and vascular irritability of the female system, induced by all the indulgences, refinements, intel-



lectual and moral culture incident to an advanced state of society, and from the numerous morbid influences thus resulting, cases must frequently occur in which nature is inadequate for delivery; cases in which females and their children must perish, if unassisted.

Let us now attend to the *facts* of the case. What says the history of our art in past times, at the present period, in all parts of the world, in these United States of America?

This history proclaims to all who will listen to the subject, to all who will read or observe, that human labours are very often preternaturally painful, tedious, and dangerous; that often the mother dies, and still more frequently the offspring of her body, the subject of her maternal anxieties, and the hope of her declining years, perishes through want of suitable assistance.

From this same history, we learn that these dangers arise from *anatomical, physiological, and pathological* states, many of which could not be avoided, all of which are dangerous, but most of which can be met with confidence, and usually triumphantly destroyed by the instructed and scientific obstetrician.

First, then, complications of labour arise from anatomical causes. As already intimated, parturition in the human female has, in comparison with this process among brutes, inherent difficulties, arising chiefly from her erect position, and from the large proportionate size of the foetal head.

Still, ordinarily, there is no difficulty; but difficulty it is evident, must occur whenever there is the smallest anatomical derangement; when from original malformation, from accident, or disease, either as regards the pelvis of the mother, or the head of the child, there is any disproportion between the infant and the bony canal through which it must pass. If such disproportion be but trifling, it is evident, labour must be tedious and painful; if greater, dangers accumulate for the mother and especially for her infant, until labour by natural efforts is impracticable. The child soon perishes, and its unfortunate mother speedily follows her unborn offspring to the world of spirits. Such cases, gentlemen, are often met with; most frequently among the luxurious and polished nations, but occasionally among the

most barbarous. Who, but the instructed anatomist, can even recognise their existence? and who, but the enlightened accoucheur, furnished with all that science and experience can afford, can ward off these impending dangers, preserving lives otherwise inevitably lost.

Again, experience also declares, that even when there is no malformation, no disproportion between the containing and contained parts, labour becomes difficult from mal-presentation of the fœtus. Wonderful are the arrangements of the God of nature, in facilitating the process of child-birth, and wonderful it is, that these arrangements are not more frequently disturbed; but nevertheless, all competent observers notice deviations of more or less importance from the natural presentation; deviations which render labour difficult, dangerous, or fatal, without artificial assistance. None but the obstetrician, who has studied his profession theoretically and practically, can detect the danger, or effectually interpose for the salvation of his patients.

Similar observations of course are true, as regards not only the bones but the soft parts of the mother and child. Should there exist any deformity of the vulva, the vagina, or the uterus, any preternatural contraction or distortion, any displacement of the uterus, whether in the form of a simple obliquity, prolapsus, or procidentia uteri, or the more difficult complications arising from anteversion, retroversion, or hernia of the uterus; should there be any malformation of the head, or body of the fœtus, labour again will become proportionably more difficult and dangerous, demanding the assistance of science to ascertain the character of the complication, and to render this process in any degree safe.

Second. Complications of labour arise frequently from physiological states, either of the uterus or general system, which occur spontaneously, and which, if not prevented or altered, become the fruitful source of the most serious difficulties and dangers.

For example, let us cursorily trace the effects of *plethora* in the female system, during the progress of gestation and parturition, and observe how productive of evil is this simple devia-

tion from a normal physiological condition—a deviation exceedingly frequent, and which, singular as the observation may seem, occurs much more frequently and intensely among the indolent and luxurious, than among the active and laborious.

There is a proneness to plethora during gestation—a plethora chiefly of the large vessels, and of the important internal organs of the body. In moderate degrees, there are merely languor, lassitude, with an indisposition to move, and feelings of oppression. When more intense, these symptoms are aggravated, and particular organs suffer more or less injuriously.

When the brain is concerned, females complain of vertigo, sensations of fulness, of pressure, or of stricture, often of intense pain, sometimes diffusive, but occasionally concentrated in particular portions, sometimes in spots of the head. The cerebral functions are now disturbed. Usually there is a disposition to drowsiness, heaviness, and stupor: the intellectual and even moral character of the female is sometimes disordered, often, it would seem, transformed, of which some curious examples could be detailed: there result singular, and often permanent derangements of the functions of sight, hearing, smell, &c.—the faculties of sensation and of motion are disturbed or imperfect: while, in more severe cases, we have violent convulsions, complete coma, and death, or effusion, with palsy of mind and body—a living death.

When the effects of congestion are chiefly remarked in the chest, there are analogous symptoms of stricture and oppression, with irregular actions of the heart, and difficult respiration. If not relieved, dangerous turgescence of the heart and lungs supervene, followed by effusions of mucus, serum, or blood, with fatal results.

Still more frequently is plethora manifested in the uterine apparatus; and here its injurious tendencies are more decided, and more fatally developed. Preternatural fulness of the uterine tissue is productive of sensations of increased pressure and weight, with a distressing disposition to bear down; pain succeeds, with irregular contractions of the uterus. True labour follows, often preceded by profuse and dangerous hemor-



rhages, and in either case, usually productive of the death of the fœtus, from its immature, undeveloped condition.

The dangerous effects of congestion, in the different organs during labour, are analogous to those already detailed, accruing during gestation, but are here often manifested with a rapidity and intensity which are quickly fatal when no suitable assistance is afforded. It is from this cause we so frequently hear of females perishing from hemorrhages, internal or external; from apoplexy, convulsions, &c., during the critical process of child-birth.

Again: Females, during pregnancy, suffer from the irritable condition of the cerebro-spinal nervous system. This is another most fruitful source of pain, of difficulty, and danger. Hence the intensity with which all intellectual and moral affections act on the parturient female. Causes of apparently the most innoxious character, will now be productive of mischief—it may be, fatal mischief. An unexpected noise, the slightest accident, often excites the uterine fibres to expel immaturesly the product of conception.

How often, also, is labour rendered painful and tedious by rigidity of the tissues, of the vulva, perineum, and cervix uteri; how often by irregular or by too powerful action of the uterine fibres; how often by inertia, or want of sufficient action of the same fibres? The experienced obstetrician alone can form any adequate idea of the vast amount of suffering resulting from these causes, of the frequency with which the child is thus lost, and of the horrible consequences resulting to the mother, who often dies from hemorrhage, exhaustion, rupture of the uterus or vagina; or when life is protracted, her health and happiness are seriously impaired from the injuries sustained.

But, finally, dangerous complications of labour arise from various pathological states, which may be local or general—which may have existed for some time previously, or be suddenly induced, tending rapidly to a fatal termination.

We need not go into great details on this subject. It is perfectly evident to the lowest capacity, that if disease exist in the uterus or its appendages, or in other organs sympathizing with

the uterus; or if the general system be involved, that labour must be thus far more unfavourable—that its dangers are aggravated—and that it may often have a fatal result to the mother and her infant. Hence, should there be, for example, inflammation of the uterus or vagina, existing previously to pregnancy and labour, or suddenly induced, parturition might occur prematurely, to the injury of the mother and the destruction of the infant. Should this inflammation be productive of induration or ulceration, simple or malignant (cancerous), the danger is necessarily exceedingly aggravated. Sympathetically, inflammations of the bladder, stomach, or intestines, even mere irritations of these organs from acidity, flatulency, acrid secretions, or undigested food, are productive of great, sometimes irremediable mischief.

The formation of tumours in the pelvis, the contraction and induration of the vagina, the accumulation of scybalous matters or other hard substances in the rectum, the formation of calculi in the bladder, are all complications to be met with, and which often render delivery at the full period of utero-gestation, impracticable—of course fatal to both the parties concerned in the labour.

The existence of chronic diseases, even in distant organs, is always hazardous, often imminently dangerous. Hence, when females fall in labour, who are the subjects of hernia, of aneurism, of abscesses in or near important organs, they are always regarded as in a most critical situation by the well-informed practitioner, who knows that their lives may, at any time, be terminated by the strangulation of the hernial tumour, by the rupture of an abscess, or of an aneurism.

So also as regards general disease, acute or chronic, of the nervous or vascular system. The sudden appearance of a violent fever, with or without severe local inflammation, not unfrequently provokes labour under circumstances of peculiar danger, from exhaustion on the one hand, or from an irritable state of the system and tissues on the other.

Acute nervous affections, such as hysteria, convulsions, simple or epileptic, are always regarded as very unfavourable

occurrences. And finally, if labour appear when the vital powers are exhausted by some chronic disease, (when dire consumption, for example, is preying on the vitals of the system,) it can hardly be expected that many would escape the impending danger, even when assisted by all that art and science can command. How uniformly fatal must all such cases be where no assistance is rendered, and especially when such delicate, exhausted beings are submitted to the care of the rash and the ignorant?

Such is a cursory view of the facts of the case, drawn from the history of obstetrics, and from the continual experience of every practitioner. And what are the results of the investigation? Has it not been demonstrated, that although parturition is a natural process; that although the God of nature and of providence has made the most wonderful provision for the safe delivery of the mother of a healthy living infant; that although in a large proportion of cases, there is no extraordinary suffering, or delay, or danger; yet, nevertheless, that there are, especially to the female in a civilized and refined state of society, almost innumerable sources of mischiefs by which labour is rendered painful, tedious, and dangerous; that these sources of mischief, derived from original or acquired anatomical peculiarities, from certain alterations in the physiological state of the organs and tissues, or from actual disease of the uterus and its appendages, or of other organs, are, as regards especially the unassisted female, unavoidable; that most of them occur suddenly, unexpectedly, (it may be in the midst of the process of delivery,) and, when not obviated, or at least mitigated by the hand of science, prove in all cases injurious, and, in most instances, fatal to the child and its interesting parent? Has it not been demonstrated, that these conclusions cannot be set aside by appeals to analogy, to parturition among the lower order of animals, or among savages; that there are necessary, natural difficulties in the human female, and also acquired peculiarities inseparably connected with the mental and moral culture, with the delicacy and refinement of an advanced state of civilization? Has it not been clearly manifested, that no



female is safe during the process of parturition, however regularly and naturally it may commence, so suddenly and so violently do dangerous complications arise; so speedily may the most youthful and vigorous mother be translated from her couch of suffering to the silence of the grave.

Such are the dangers; but the ignorant or prejudiced skeptic may still affirm, that granting these difficulties may occur, that dangerous complications may arise, yet, nevertheless, that females are not more safe with professional assistance, than when intrusted to the hands of the uninstructed midwife.

We answer by again appealing to facts; facts which are almost daily witnessed by the skilful accoucheur. He knows, for it is constantly his delightful privilege to be the servant of obstetric science; he knows, how successfully pain may be alleviated or removed by the resources of his art; how frequently the causes of tedious labour can be obviated; how a favourable and rapid termination can be promoted; how the most imminent dangers to the mother or child can be avoided; how labours, altogether impracticable by all the efforts of nature, and all the ill-directed and injurious measures of the ignorant and rash empiric, can be often successfully terminated, when the principles of our science are fully understood, and skilfully reduced to practice. This, gentlemen, is no vain boasting. It may, indeed, be so regarded by those who are too prejudiced to investigate, or too ignorant to comprehend the science of tokology; but the experienced and instructed accoucheur has an internal consciousness of the truth of these assertions. He has too often witnessed these results, too often been the honoured instrument in the hands of a beneficent Providence, in procuring these blessings; has too frequently had all his mental powers, and his moral feelings, elevated and supremely gratified by the triumphs of his art, to doubt its efficiency, to hesitate in making and sustaining the declaration, that every parturient female should be attended by an instructed, a scientific accoucheur; that every case of labour should be carefully watched by a competent witness, who may detect



the least déviation from the natural process, and be prepared to afford the requisite assistance.

That these facts are true, that these inferences are just, will, we trust, be evident to you who shall attend the ensuing lectures, and be hereafter more clearly confirmed by personal experience, when you shall enjoy that almost sublime happiness, of preserving life by the application of the principles of our science. From attendance here, you will soon learn, that this happiness cannot be enjoyed, that these blessings cannot be bestowed on the parturient female by the mere physician. Much peculiar knowledge is required—the physician must become an obstetrician; he must be indoctrinated with the principles of tokology, before he can ever satisfactorily detect the nature of the difficulties and dangers of parturition; and, of course, before he can afford the necessary relief.

It must now be evident, that the prejudices which have hitherto existed against this department of medicine, are unfounded; that the usual natural process of parturition can be, and often is, disturbed; that the most serious and terrific dangers do occasionally arise, and that the instructed practitioner is, in the present advanced state of our science, so well furnished on all points, that he can, almost universally, either prevent or successfully combat these threatening dangers; that, indoctrinated with the true principles of obstetrics, theoretically and practically, he can, with great confidence, approach the bedside of the suffering female, ready to afford the requisite assistance for the alleviation of her agonies, and often for the preservation of her life and that of her offspring.

The question now is, gentlemen, how far will you assist in this interesting and important, this benevolent and beneficent work? To what extent will you devote the energies of your mind and hearts, to alleviate the sufferings of woman, and to snatch her and her offspring from impending dangers? Your presence here would indicate that you are not subjected to the prejudices we have been combating; that you are not disposed to leave every thing to nature, and to allow art and science on no occasion to interfere. We hope, on the contrary, that you

are fully determined to improve the present opportunity for acquiring those fundamental principles which will enable you to go forth from these halls thoroughly furnished for the successful practice of the obstetric art; fully prepared, not only to afford that relief which our science, in its present improved condition, ought on all occasions to extend to the fairest portion of creation, but so to improve and extend its principles, and to diffuse so widely its beneficial influences, that present and future generations will rejoice that you were students of medicine—that your attention was concentrated on the science and practice of tokology.